

NEW
SERIES

SEPTEMBER

VOL.
34

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM
YEAR TO YEAR."

All the Year Round

a
Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS

PART 190.

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1884.

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Thy beauty is to me.

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I loved her for that she was beautiful;
And that to me she seemed to be all nature,
And all varieties of things in one:
Would set at night in clouds of tears, and rise
All light and laughter in the morning; fear
No petty customs nor appearances;
But think what others only dreamed about;
And say what others did but think; and do
What others would but say; and glory in
What others dared but do; so pure withal
In soul: in heart and act such conscious, yet
Such careless innocence, she made round her
A halo of delight; 'twas these which won me;
And that she never schooled within her breast
One thought or feeling, but gave holiday
To all; and that she made all even mine,
In the communion of love: and we
Grew like each other, for we loved each other;
She, mild and generous as the air in spring;
And I, like earth, all budding out with love.

THE LOVER'S PANGS AT PARTING.

It was even thus.
I said we were to part. She nothing spake.
There was no discord; it was music ceased;
Life's thrilling, bounding, gloriating joy, ceased. Sate
Like a house-god, she, her hands fixed on her knee.
Her dark hair loose and long, the wild bright eye
Of desolation flashed through, lay around her.
She spake not, moved not; more than act or speech
Her eye I felt. I came and knelt beside her.
And my heart shook this building of my breast,
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It is the saddest and the sorest sight,
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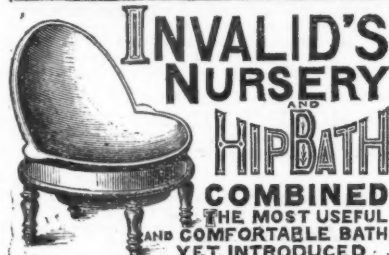
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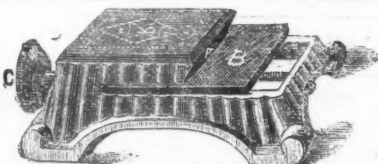
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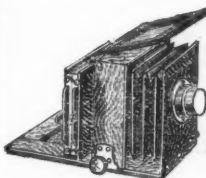
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SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1884.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

GERALD.

BY ELEANOR C. PRICE.

CHAPTER XXIX. AT SEA.

WHEN Theo had time to think, when she was left alone on board the mail-steamer at Southampton, when the bell had rung, and Hugh's tall figure had disappeared among the crowd, she was seized with a terrible loneliness. All the old peaceful trust in Hugh had come back within the last two days, brought to life again by his own generous unselfishness. She knew that he loved her now, just as he did in the winter, when he asked her to marry him; she knew, when she thought about it quietly, that he always would love her just the same; but she was not angry with him now, only sad and sorry. She knew now that this love was of a high kind, worthy of that lover who said:

For I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.

This is possible, but it is very rare, and seldom understood or rewarded in this life.

Theo understood it better than many women do, and perhaps Gerald, for whom she was giving up everything, would hardly have approved of the tears that dimmed her eyes as she looked back at England, and thought regretfully and tenderly of Hugh. He had made her promise that she would write to him, and would tell him if there was anything in the world that he could do for her.

Theo had an instinctive feeling that she would break this last promise, and that Hugh's help, dear and valuable as it must always be, would be the last thing she would ask for in future.

Their parting had been very friendly

and grave; both faces were sad. Hugh had not tormented her with a word of remonstrance; he had inspected her cabin, had talked to the captain, had hardly, to outward eyes, shown as much feeling as her brother would have shown under such circumstances.

At the last moment he discovered some slight acquaintances of his own among the passengers—a Colonel and Mrs. Forester, who were going back to an appointment at Cape Town. In his gravest, most indifferent manner, Hugh introduced his cousin to these people, who looked at her kindly; but Theo was rather vexed and bored by the introduction. She had had a fancy for being quite alone, and dreaming, and watching the sea, all the way out to Cape Town.

Colonel Forester, a good-humoured, middle-aged man, who had known Hugh's father pretty well some years before, was a little puzzled by the mystery of this girl's going out alone. He seized Hugh just as he was leaving the ship.

"Your cousin is of course going to some friends at the Cape?" he said. "We can't be of any use out there?"

"Thank you," said Hugh with a curious coldness of look and manner; "I can hardly answer. There is only one person—in fact, my cousin is going out to be married. I suppose he will meet her."

"Oh, very well," said Colonel Forester. "Then of course he will have made all arrangements. Do I know him, I wonder?"

"That is not likely," said Hugh. "He went out last spring to the Diamond Fields. His name is Fane."

"You astonish me!" said Colonel Forester. "Miss Meynell surely— But I beg your pardon," as Hugh turned a little paler, and made a movement to go; "I

only meant to say that Mrs. Forester and I will be very glad if we can be of any use."

"Thank you, Colonel Forester. I shall be most grateful," said Hugh; and then he shook hands with the Colonel, and went gravely on shore.

Colonel Forester went back to his wife and told her the explanation of the mystery, adding that this marriage was plainly against the wish of the young lady's relations.

"You must be kind to the poor girl," said the Colonel, in his eager manner. "This Diamond Fields fellow will be marrying her from St. George's Hotel, or something of that sort. She must be married from our house."

Mrs. Forester was very gentle, rather shy, and full of that active goodness which soldiers' wives so often have in perfection. She had lost all her children when they were little, and this, and the sweetness of her brown eyes, and the clearness of her wits, may have explained the fact that she ruled the Colonel with an undisputed sway. She had also ruled his regiment when he had been attached to one.

On this occasion she did not quite agree with him.

"Don't say anything about that yet," she said. "The Meynells are not a very nice family; and as to my being kind to this girl, she looks so cold and stiff that I am afraid of her. I don't think she wants me, Arthur, really."

"How can a girl be going out alone, and not want you?" asked Colonel Forester.

His wife laughed, and shook her head.

For the first few days Theo was very much alone, and seemed to wish to be so. Her looks and ways kept people at a distance; the only person who talked to her much was Colonel Forester, who admired her, and took a great interest in her, and was a good-natured chatterbox besides. His friendship with her advanced much faster than his wife's. Mrs. Forester did not quite like the idea of a girl of good family starting off in this adventurous manner against the wish of her friends; she was also puzzled by the fact that Theo was making a sort of friendship with a very odd little woman, who emerged from her cabin after two or three days, and walked feebly about on deck, holding Theo's arm. She was dressed very smartly, and had a black, untidy fringe hanging over her forehead; she went off into silly

fits of laughter, and sometimes had a little dark baby in her arms, and a second-rate young man standing by her side; but this young man was generally playing cards, or amusing himself in some way apart from his wife. Mrs. Forester had several friends on board, and neither she nor any of them thought these people at all fit to speak to. She would not have noticed them among the varied crowd of passengers, unless they had appealed to her kindness in some way, but the sympathy that Theo showed this little creature was a strange thing, and attracted Mrs. Forester's eyes, which, with all their softness, had a keen power of watching. Even Colonel Forester was puzzled, and held a little back from his friend Miss Meynell, when she sat for a whole evening beside this woman on deck, under the glorious stars, and the strange pair of friends talked in a low voice together, each deeply interested in what the other was saying.

At last the little woman gathered up her shawls and went below, and Theo sat still where she was, looking out upon the sea. Some yards away Colonel Forester was standing behind his wife's chair. They had been drinking coffee, and talking to some of their friends, who had now left them; the eyes and thoughts of both husband and wife turned towards Theo.

"Now, I shall go and talk to her," whispered the Colonel. "Will you come too?"

"Suppose I go by myself?" said Mrs. Forester softly.

"That's a capital idea, Fanny. Ask her to go ashore with us to-morrow."

"We shall see," said Mrs. Forester, and she moved gently across and joined Theo.

She sat down, and began talking about Madeira, where they would arrive the next day. Theo talked too, but in such a dreamy way that Mrs. Forester found it very difficult to go on with the conversation; still, in spite of Theo's most absent answers, the soft beauty of her profile, the light and depth in her eyes when she looked up, the noble gentleness that seemed to breathe about her like an atmosphere, all charmed and attracted Mrs. Forester, so that she felt no wish to get up and go away.

"This is a very remarkable girl," she thought to herself, and she studied Theo through one or two long silences, during which the other people laughed and talked in the distance and somebody was singing; and through it all the steamer throbbed and panted, and the water washed gently

along her sides, and she left a long luminous path over the dark sea in her wake, and the great stars shone down gloriously.

"Do you like being at sea? I suppose it is your first long voyage?" said Mrs. Forester.

"It is lovely," said Theo. "Yes; I have only crossed the Channel."

"I wonder if you have any idea of what—what Africa is like?" said Mrs. Forester after a pause.

"Not much, I suppose," said Theo, "though I have been thinking about it. But it must be rather free and glorious. It is very sad to go out there, meaning to hate it, like that poor little thing."

"Do you mean——" began Mrs. Forester.

"That little Mrs. Lee. We are going to the same place, you know—the Diamond Fields, and she is so unhappy; she thinks it is all so dreadful."

"I am afraid the Fields——" said Mrs. Forester, and then she stopped herself, for she did not like to prophesy evil.

"She is so ill and miserable, and so anxious about her baby, and I think her husband is not very nice," said Theo. "I am very sorry for her."

"You have been very kind to her," said Mrs. Forester; "but she laughs a good deal; is she really so miserable?"

"Oh, she is young; she must laugh sometimes. I have tried to comfort her. I have told her that I shall be there too, and that I will try to help her," said Theo gravely.

Mrs. Forester sighed.

"You will find a good many unhappy women there," she said; "the men are not a nice set. And don't you know anybody—have you no friends at all out there? You won't like me to say it, it sounds cold and worldly, but you must not have that sort of people for your friends. I suppose, though, Mr. Fane has been there already, and he will know."

"Yes; but it can't be quite like England, can it?" said Theo gently.

"It will not be at all like England, my dear—the England you belong to. I am afraid, after a time, you won't like it very much. Are you likely to stay there long?"

"Oh yes, I think so, for a great many years," said Theo.

Mrs. Forester asked a few little questions, and Theo told her a great deal about herself, and Gerald, and their prospects as far as she knew them. She suddenly discovered that it was comforting to talk peacefully

under the stars to this kind woman, whose manner was so gentle and soft, and who seemed to understand all her feelings so well. For Mrs. Forester had a charming way of listening and of sympathising, when she had got over her first little shyness with a person she did not know. Every word that Theo said interested her more deeply in this girl, who was going out in such faith and confidence to a life she could not possibly realise, and trying to support other wayfarers as she went along. To think that she knew no one—absolutely no one—in that great, terrible continent! that everything depended for her on the arrangements of one young man—her lover, certainly, but did that ensure the perfect thoughtfulness needed by a romantic, refined girl like this? Mrs. Forester's heart was touched; all the feelings of a mother, so long buried under silent grief, woke up into life again as she sat beside Theo, and thought, "This might have been my child." At last, when they had talked for a long time, she laid her hand on Theo's, and said:

"My dear, when we reach Cape Town you must let me take you to my house. You must belong to me till I give you up to Mr. Fane."

"Oh, thank you! What makes you so good to me?" said Theo, and, with a sudden impulse, she stooped and touched Mrs. Forester's pretty, soft hand with her lips. "But he may have arranged something already," she added, hesitating and blushing.

"He is not likely to have made a better arrangement than mine," said Mrs. Forester.

The next morning they anchored off Madeira, and Theo went ashore with the Foresters and some of their friends. She was quite happy now; the sadness, the regrets, the anxieties of England were fading in the distance, and Gerald was waiting for her not so very far off, in a country, perhaps, as beautiful as this, where the sun shone everlastingly, and the brown-faced people laughed gaily, and flowers that she had never dreamed of grew in glorious gardens, green paradises among the ridges of red rock. Colonel Forester was charmed with her enthusiasm. The blue sea danced and sparkled, rocking the little red and green boats that darted over it; the brown divers, with their white teeth and flashing eyes, splashed, and laughed, and screamed about the ship in a storm of silver spray. On shore the waves

broke gently at the foot of great brown rocks, garlanded above with green and scarlet. The narrow, stony streets, with their deep black shadows and brilliant lights, the market loaded with fruit, the dark-eyed people, with their bright handkerchiefs, made Theo think of Italy. She stayed on shore all day, and Colonel Forester went about with her everywhere, showing her his favourite views. One was only more enchanting than another.

It seemed strange to be off again, but Theo was much happier after that landing at Madeira. Her kindness to Mrs. Lee was not at all affected by her new friendship with Mrs. Forester, who had entirely taken possession of her now. It was a new thing in Theo's life to have a woman like this for her friend, who had been trained by trouble, who knew the world without being worldly, and whose warm, affectionate, unselfish nature was made strong and beautiful by religion. In those long days and evenings they had many talks, and Mrs. Forester soon knew all Theo's history, and, suspecting that Gerald Fane was not quite her equal, thought of giving her up to him with pain.

And so they sailed on, past Teneriffe, half-hidden in clouds, over a sea brilliant by day, and crowded with flying-fish; phosphorescent at night under the moon and the deep blue sky. They went on shore again at St. Helena, and climbed about the stern old rock till they were tired.

After that Cape Town seemed to be very near, and the old dreaminess came over Theo again. She roused herself, however, and spent more time than ever in comforting Mrs. Lee, whose husband had proved more and more on the voyage what a worthless fellow he was. This poor little thing dreaded the future so much, that she could not speak of it without tears. Theo tried hard to make her look on the bright side of things, listening patiently to her complaints, and promising to be her friend always; and Mrs. Forester could not remonstrate any more.

As the days went on, she and her husband became more and more anxious to see Gerald Fane, and to convince themselves that he would make his wife happy. They both doubted it, they could hardly tell why, for Theo's confidence in him was as deep as her love. She was almost silent on the subject, but Mrs. Forester knew that very well.

"The impudence, though, of asking a

girl like that to go to the Fields!" was Colonel Forester's constant theme.

"I would have gone there with you, Arthur," said his wife.

"You would not have been allowed, my dear," said the Colonel. "Women like you and Miss Meynell are very generous creatures, and their goodness ought not to be taken advantage of."

"When you were young," said Mrs. Forester, "I suspect you would have been of a different opinion."

"Never," said the Colonel. "I was never so conceited, to begin with. I never thought you would feel hardships and discomforts less because you were married to me."

Mrs. Forester laughed.

"I don't suppose I should," said she. "Miss Meynell is made of finer stuff. She will bear anything for the sake of that young man. Her courage won't fail."

"Her health will, and her spirit, too, in time," said the Colonel. "I can't bear the thought of that young man."

At last the Twelve Apostles rose out of the sea, and Table Mountain, dark and stern, and a white town lying under the hills, and docks, and masts, and trees, all in the clear brilliant air of a southern morning. It was very early when they entered the docks, and the sun shone on Theo's first sight of her new country. She and Mrs. Forester were standing on deck in all the confusion, wrapped in shawls, for the morning was cold; in that part of the world it was spring.

Theo's eyes were fixed on the long road beyond the docks, crowded with Malay carts, and with people of every complexion, dressed in all sorts of gay colours. Though she looked, she did not see much; she was dreaming, hardly realising that this was Cape Town, hardly expecting, in spite of all, really to see Gerald.

Mrs. Forester was looking for him in a much more wakeful fashion. It was she, not Theo, who saw a tall young man come on board, and make his way quietly through the crowd on deck, and approach them gently, with his eyes fixed on Theo, who did not see him.

It was indeed the story of the Sleeping Beauty, telling itself over again, as all the old stories do. There she stood, statuesque and still, cold, absent, quiet, and a little sad, as she gazed straight before her.

Mrs. Forester was just going to touch her, and to point out Gerald, who was within a few yards of them now, but he

came up too quickly at last, and stood suddenly between Theo and her dreams, as he used in the early days of their acquaintance.

All the absence and the vagueness were gone then. Mrs. Forester just caught the one quick glance that she gave Gerald, and the sudden flush and softening that came into her face, and then left them together, and turned away to her husband, who came up to her just then. She was laughing, and her eyes were full of tears.

"By Jove! Fanny," muttered the Colonel, "you were never so glad to see me!"

She took no notice of this accusation.

"He is a dear fellow, but not very strong," she whispered. "But I like him extremely. Oh, Arthur, they can't go to the Fields."

"And you really are actually come!" said Gerald, standing by Theo, and looking down into her happy face.

"Didn't you know?" she said in a low voice.

"Did I? Well, ever since I wrote to you, I've known how awfully selfish I was. But it's all right now. You won't be sorry that you came?"

"Gerald!" she said, with the faintest shade of reproach and sadness; and there was no more time to talk then.

For Combe joined her mistress, and Mrs. Lee struggled up to say good-bye, and giggled horribly in Gerald's face, and then Theo remembered that she must introduce him to the Foresters, and, in all the confusion of going on shore, the impatient fellow began to think that he would never have her to himself after all.

OUR SHINING RIVER.

V.

THE dews of summer night did fall,
The moon (sweet regent of the sky)
Silver'd the walls of Cumnor Hall,
And many an oak that grew thereby.

These lines, from the old ballad, rang in my ears as I breasted the steep hill, along which the white, dusty road wound up to the village of Cumnor. The moon was there, rising behind the hill, her silvery disc showing pale and wan in the ruddy glare of the sunset, while clumps and avenues of tall elms, in soft, bold masses against the evening sky, seemed to herald the sight of some lordly dwelling.

Full many a traveller oft hath sighed,
And pensive wept the Countess' fall,
As, wand'ring onward, they've espied
The haunted towers of Cumnor Hall.

But the next turn of the road shows that the trees surround an empty, desolate site. The turf grows over the foundations of the haunted towers; the garden terraces are still to be traced; the last remains of the pleasance where Amy Robsart whiled away the sad hours of her last summer—the sentiment of the spot lingers about it still, with all its gloom and mystery still unrevealed. A somewhat solemn site, sloping down towards the setting sun, with trees about it, and over the trees the tower of Cumnor Church, solemn, too, and reposeful in the glow of parting day.

Quite in character with the scene is the lonely inn on the opposite side of the highway—an ancient house with curiously carved window-beams and doorway—that must have stood there long before Amy Robsart's time, when Cumnor Place was the country seat of the lordly abbots of Abingdon. The fresh, pleasant breeze on the hill whispers how long ago, when cloister and town were baking in the hot sunshine of the long summer days, the abbot and the dignitaries of his abbey took refuge here from the sultry heat, and paced those terraced walks. And here, probably, lived the steward, in this house whose sign suggests the memories of later and more stirring times. For this little inn, placid and quiet in the heart of this silent country, bears the cognisance of The Bear and Ragged Staff—the badge of the Lords of Warwick and Leicester—and this is the one relic that remains of the hero of Kenilworth in connection with the scene.

But more to present purpose is the prospect of getting something to eat out of The Bear and Ragged Staff. Imagination had suggested a pleasant evening meal in the shades of Cumnor, at the worst a cold chicken or the universal ham and eggs. But the landlord shakes his head. A cool mug of ale and a crust of bread-and-cheese were all that modern Cumnor could afford. The old kitchen, where once blazed a hospitable hearth, is now set out with ale and cider barrels in long array; and instead of the old oak parlour we have a bare, whitewashed room surrounded by creaking, crazy settles. And here the nightly village council is being held; the men have dropped in on their way home from work: the mason with his wrinkled, crinkled face; the easy-going carpenter with his long whiskers, where the shavings have stuck; and all round a row of farm-hands of various kinds, but all of the one rather

peculiar type, small-featured, but aquiline, with hairless, terra-cotta faces, and mouths that might have been cut with a knife in the tightly-drawn skin. Weary, placid, silent, is this crowd of witnesses in smock-frocks and leather gaiters, motionless as so many carved, wooden effigies, but not unobservant, and even at some village witticism from the more sprightly artisan, the wooden figures show signs of life, the beards wag all—or the chins where the beards should be—a short, hoarse laugh goes round, and then the machinery stops, the figures are all motionless once more.

But the landlord, having placed a portion of bread-and-cheese before the new arrival, takes his accustomed seat as the permanent president of the assembly, the first among equals, with his back to the chimney, over which is a brightly-coloured print representing an Atlantic steamer of the Allan line gaily ploughing its way across the ocean, Westward ho! There are other advertisements of emigrant-steamers on the walls suggestive to the weary head of the promised land over the westward seas, divided from him by the insurmountable barrier of a want of pence.

A solemn silence reigns for a time in the room, where a twilight gloom has commenced, while the landscape without is still suffused with rosy light. Then the new comer attracts attention by consulting a pocket-map to make sure of his future course.

"Niver could make out," remarks a countryman, casting his eyes to the ceiling as if to address some invisible cherub there aloft; "niver could make out how folk can find their way along by thic things they call maaps."

"That kind of scholarship's beyond me," says another countryman, shaking his head, and then, as if startled at the sound of his own voice, concealing his countenance behind a mug of ale.

"It's easy enough for a scholar, I tell ye;" this spoke the mason with an air of suppressed knowledge. "I could have done it myself with practice."

"Ah, I've always heard tell how you were a good scholar, Master Ashlar," rejoined the other.

"Oh, that be nothing," pursued the mason with a gloomy mien. "There be nothing in being a self-taught scholar nowadays. There be no encouragement for such. Ah, the hours I've spent over my book! Tell you what, mates," rather

fiercely; "if I'd my time to come over again, I'd niver touch a book—niver look inside one."

"Well, there ain't much advantage in it if it comes to that," said the landlord soothingly.

"Advantage!" repeated Master Ashlar scornfully. "Why, I tell ye I've read all about the old history of this place in a book called Kenilworth."

"Ah, there be a kind of story about this place I've heard tell. Some kind of lord lived here once, they do say——"

"'Ees," interposed the landlord. "Why, there's many people come here just to see the place. Though there's not much to see to my fancy."

But the mouths of the country-people once opened on the subject there was a good deal to be told. One man, whose grandfather had lived in this very house, had heard him talk of the fine house that once stood in front of these windows; the fields about were still called the Park—a pond close by was known as the fish-pond; and the well that supplied the house was still in existence.

"Ah, I should like to have the digging of them fields twice over," suggested a jobbing man, who seemed to intimate that he knew more about the matter than he chose to mention, and there was a general drawing of the breath on the part of those present, as if in awe at the dim suggestion of pots of gold lying there below the surface.

After all, there was something ghostly and suggestive in the aspect of the deserted site and the gloomy trees about it. You might fancy the light robe of a woman flitting along those neglected terraces; and there is the church just above—all unchanged—where the deserted wife must often have sought relief from her misery in prayer.

"A good, virtuous gentlewoman," said Lady Dudley's waiting-maid, "who did dearlie love her. 'A good, virtuous gentlewoman, and dailie would pray upon her knees, and divers times she saithe that she hath harde her prairie to God to deliver her from Disperaconne.'"

Was it this desperation long prayed against in vain that drove the poor woman at last to her end? Who can say? Sir Walter Scott is wildly wide of the mark, even allowing for the exigencies of fiction. But the real story is perhaps even more dark and tragic than the fictitious.

Anyhow, the gloom that gathered about

Cumnor Church seemed quite abnormal in intensity, especially about the western tower under the shadow of the trees that overhang the place. Here are the last traces of the old building, the core of an archway deeply sunk in the soil—once a gateway, probably, that led from the house to the venerable Norman doorway—the western entrance of the church. A subdued light gleamed through the lofty clerestory windows. It is a handsome, well-proportioned little church, standing high above the village, with the parsonage just below, all overshadowed by trees. Some bird of the night wheels past the old tower, and just then the bell tolls out with solemn cadence, again recalling the old ballad :

The death-bell thrice was heard to ring,
An aerial voice was heard to call,
And thrice the raven flapp'd his wing,
Around the tow'rs of Cumnor Hall.

The church was open, and there was light within, for a young man was there with a lamp, busily engaged in making arrangements for some coming service, the whole interior being kept in fresh and dainty order; and by the fitful light we can make out in the chancel the handsome altar-tomb of Sir Anthony Forster, one of the chief actors in the Robsart tragedy, with brasses of the knight and his dame kneeling face to face, with a small group of children in the rear. A grave, thoughtful face is that of the knight, disturbed by no remorse or dread. The three bugle-horns in his arms, repeated in different parts of the monument, represent the origin of his family and their surname, as King's Foresters, that is, in the then not distant past. But no good came to the knight from the possession of the old manor-house of the abbots of Abingdon; he saw his children all die before him, and in his will he left Cumnor Place to his staunch friend and patron, the Earl of Leicester. A singular bequest in any case, but still more strange if we credit the commonly-received, or what we may call the Waverley version of the tragic mystery of Cumnor, and believe that the Earl himself had given the order for his wife's murder.

But the young man who looks after the church, and who is excellently well-informed as to its history, does not consider that the tomb of Sir Anthony exhausts the interest of the church. There in the south transept is the chapel which the abbots of Abingdon reared for their own tomb-house, and here they sleep, still undisturbed, in the vault

below. The young man here taps the stone floor with his heel, and the stones give back a hollow, resonant murmur.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight, as I turn resolutely on the way to Oxford—a wide and pleasant landscape, with glimpses of far distant hills. The distance cannot be great, and yet the way seems to lengthen out marvellously, and the moon is well up in the sky before I catch sight of the twinkling lights of Oxford, and the many spires of her colleges and churches, whitened by the silvery moonbeams. But there was still a flat and rather depressing patch of country to be crossed, intersected by channels and watercourses, before the cheerful lights and brilliant shops of the High Street dissipated all thoughts of doleful Cumnor.

Here was Oxford under a new aspect, the undergraduates all gone down, and the academical replaced by the military element, the militia marching through the streets to the strains of the band, and military gossip replacing the language of the schools in the coffee-room of The Mitre. Charlwood had been there and had ordered dinner, it was satisfactory to learn. And then, with a saunter up the High Street, the moonlight making strange, fantastic light and shade among the roofs and gables of the mediæval buildings, and with a glance at Magdalen Bridge, and the sweet, solemn Magdalen Tower, the time of waiting came to an end. Charlwood was smoking in the porch as I came up, and greeted me heartily. His news would keep till after dinner, he said, and against this I had nothing to say.

As we were sitting down to dinner I noticed a stout and very rosy gentleman, who occupied a little table to himself, and was spreading his dinner-napkin over his knees with a rather disconsolate air.

"You ought to know that old fellow," I said to Charley. "He knows your uncle, anyhow."

For I had recognised the occupant of the waggonette, who had driven past Charlwood Hall the day before.

"No—I think not," said Charley, sticking up his eye-glass in a supercilious way. But Mr. Boothby had seen our glances in his direction, and rose and approached our table.

"Now you young gentlemen were thinking of asking me to join your party, only you were a little shy. But, hang it, I'm not going to dine by myself if I can help

it. Waiter, lay my cover at these gentlemen's table."

Charlwood was looking all kinds of outraged dignity at the intruder, when suddenly his face relaxed and his eye-glass dropped.

"Must be old Boothby by his cheek," he said. "How are you, old boy? How's the bird's-eye and the shag?"

"Tush, tush!" cried Mr. Boothby with his jolly laugh; "I haven't got any samples with me now. Junior partner travels now while I take my pleasure. But I can't quite make you out. One of those jolly young Oxford chaps I used to meet a few years ago. Extraordinary! Well, never mind, since we're all friends. Waiter, are you going to bring that soup now?"

Charley had given me a nudge, warning me not to refresh Mr. Boothby's memory prematurely, and the pair were soon in animated talk, Charley falling in wonderfully with the old gentleman's humour, and making him laugh till the room rang again. Mr. Boothby had talked of his joining our party, but in reality we had joined his, and a hospitable amphitryon he proved, calling for this wine and the other till we had a regular battery of bottles and glasses about us. It was a battery that began to tell upon Charley, who, really worried and anxious as I could see, gave way to rather boisterous merriment and was evidently prepared to drown his cares in wine.

In the midst of our banquet the door opened, and two more guests presented themselves, and I recognised at once Mr. Thomas, formerly of The Crab and Flowerpot, and his son Albert. Now the former had not been able quite to get rid of his deferential landlord-like bearing, and while he attempted to enter the room with the air of a gentleman at large, there was a subdued kind of tone about him, as of one more accustomed to take orders than to give them. As he approached our table Mr. Boothby eyed him with the same sort of supercilious glance that Charley had employed on his behalf not long before.

"Friend of yours?" asked Mr. Boothby, turning to me, whom he regarded as a quiet, insignificant kind of person evidently.

"No, hang it!" cried Charley, turning a little pale. "A friend of mine. I say, Thomas," addressing his proposed father-in-law, "I'm dining with friends. Can't you leave me alone?"

"Come, come, Mr. Pyecroft," said

Thomas in a deprecatory manner; "don't cut up rough, Mr. P."

At the name Pyecroft Mr. Boothby banged his fist upon the table.

"What, young Charlwood Pyecroft?" he exclaimed. "My goodness! Extraordinary!"

"Ah, I know your face, too, sir," said Thomas, sliding into a chair. "Sit down, Albert," to his son; "we'll have a glass of wine with these gentlemen."

Meantime Mr. Boothby had been regarding Mr. Thomas fixedly.

"I have it now," he cried at last. "Crab and Flowerpot! Many a jolly day I've had there. Know my face—yes, I dare say, and my back too, for you've stood behind my chair often enough at those big dinners."

"Yes, I dare say, Mr. Boothby," rejoined Mr. Thomas with an uneasy smile, "and many a good order I've given you—Virginny, bird's-eye, and best shag."

"So you have, old fellow," cried Boothby with his accustomed roar; "many thanks for past favours. Well, you'll wine with us now. Waiter! Another bottle of Heidsick. But Pyecroft! why, I've been connected with the Pyecrofts for years. Ain't I trustee for your cousin under old Charlwood's will? Charlwood made his money in Bristol? Now, waiter, where's that champagne?" And then, as the waiter placed the bottle upon the table, "Clean glasses! For, gentlemen," turning to the rest of us, "like Mrs. Gamp, I'm going to propogate a toast. Somebody you know, Mr. Pyecroft—eh? Sly dog!"

"I think not," said Charlwood, rising. "I don't think a public room is the place for this kind of fun. I'll leave you to your wine, for I've had quite enough, and I've got business to talk over with Mr. Penrice."

A sudden silence fell upon the party as we left the room. No doubt they were offended at our behaviour, but there was no particular reason why I should care about that, and Charlwood seemed quite reckless as to consequences.

"Isn't it abominable!" he cried, as we walked up and down the High Street in front of the hotel, smoking and trying to keep cool. "There is this fellow Thomas following me about like a shadow. I can't have a quiet evening with you to talk over my scrape but he must follow and poke in his disagreeable face."

I suggested that this was annoying, but, after all, Charlwood had brought it on

himself, and then why had he run away from his pleasant party on the river?

"Well, you know," replied Charlwood, "I couldn't stand the old fellow's impudence. Somehow or other he had heard of my uncle's people coming down the river, and he insisted that I should introduce them, bring them to join the Thomases on the river. And when I told him I could not think of such a thing, he informed me that he was not at all afraid of Squire Pycroft, that he had the old gentleman in a cleft-stick, and that he looked forward to a double wedding—mine, don't you see, and his son Albert, that young cub—to whom do you think?—to my cousin Claudia."

Of course I had heard something of all this before, but I did not see the full enormity of the thing till now. That this Albert, this cub—for he was a cub; Pycroft was quite right there—should dare to raise his eyes to Claudia—to my Claudia as I had begun to call her in my own heart, it was a thing not to be endured, and I fully sympathised with Charley in his wrath.

"I thought you'd see it like that, old chap," said Charley. "Well, I've almost made up my mind that I will cut the whole lot of them, go back to my uncle, partake of the fatted calf, and marry Claudia. Of course, we shall have to smart handsomely to the Thomases, but the old boy can stand that, I should think."

Charlwood's audacity almost took away my breath. And Rebecca, the girl who loved him and trusted him, was she to be thrown aside like an old glove? But that was no affair of mine; Rebecca had her father and her brother to champion her, while I was bound by my friendship for Charley, and by my implied promise to Mrs. Pycroft to lead him in the way that would be the best for his own and the family interests. Well, here he was in the most satisfactory mood for that purpose. In his present temper I might take him this very night to join the family circle at Stanton Harcourt. He would be received with joy by the elders, no doubt, and Claudia—well, Claudia was too young and inexperienced to withstand the family sentiment. She liked her cousin well enough, and if I had made the least impression upon that unruffled bosom, that impression would be faint and evanescent, no doubt. Claudia would repine a little at the sudden cutting short of her longed-for expedition, for the Pycrofts would

hardly venture to run the gauntlet of the vengeful Thomases, and indeed, the real motive for the journey would have been satisfied, and they would all return to Charlwood Hall to issue invitations, and set the bells a ringing for the bridal.

As things were hanging thus in the balance, some people approached the door of the hotel—two girls, and a clerical personage in a long black cloak, who was escorting them. These girls were Boothby's daughters, and the whole party were chattering away merrily.

"You'll come in and see papa?" said one of the girls, as they approached the steps.

"No, not to-night," said the cleric, who seemed to be some college don. "I'll call for you soon after breakfast."

"But here is papa!" cried one of the girls; and sure enough Mr. Boothby came staggering to the door, lifting his hat, and gasping as if for fresh air.

He had taken a good deal of wine, no doubt, but he seemed to be a man who could take a good deal without showing it, and certainly his disordered looks were not the result of intoxication. The girls cried out in alarm:

"Oh, papa! What is the matter?" and he looked at them in a dazed way, as if he hardly knew them.

"Nothing—nothing's the matter," he gasped at last. "No, there's no bad news, no telegrams. No; go to bed, girls," crossly enough. "I've had a bit of a shock, but nothing you're concerned with. Go to bed, girls."

Mr. Boothby stood for a while, supporting himself by the pillar of the porch, a sort of vinous Samson deprived of his strength and in bondage among the Philistines. But the air seemed to revive him, and, after passing his handkerchief across his brow several times, and wiping his lips, which seemed dry and parched, he resumed some of his free and jovial bearing.

"Sold it all," he soliloquised, quite unconscious of our neighbourhood. "Sold it all! Then where the deuce is the money?" and with that he turned and walked into the house.

Hardly had Mr. Boothby disappeared when Mr. Thomas took his place. Not in the least disconcerted he, but apparently in high good-humour, with a satisfied smile on his thin lips. He did not indulge in any soliloquy, and, with sharper eyes than Mr. Boothby, at once made us out—Charley and me—as we stood still smoking in the pathway.

"I want you young fellows," he said. "We're all stopping here for the night, I suppose. Come upstairs and have your café with us, or a drop of sperrit-and-water. I've had a nice long chat with your friend, and he's enlightened me on one or two p'int, and, ecod! I think I've enlightened him!"

Mr. Thomas chuckled maliciously over this, and seemed altogether so knowing and confident that Charley was quite overpowered.

"We had better go," he muttered; and we followed Thomas upstairs.

"Now, you go in first, captain," said Mr. Thomas, opening the door of a sitting-room.

And there stood Rebecca, as charming as can be conceived, in an evening-dress, with some beautiful black lace wound about her handsome shoulders.

"Oh, Charley, you have come back!" she cried, holding out her arms with such love and joy in her eyes that Charley would have had the feelings of a stockfish if he could have refrained from running forward and clasping her in his arms.

Mr. Thomas shut the door upon the lovers.

"You and I will go and have a drink in the bar, Mr. Penrice. He ain't a bad-intentioned fellow, ain't the captain; but weak—decidedly weak. Well, it's a good thing he's got friends to look after him now and keep him steady."

Mr. Thomas tried his best that evening to find out whereabouts the Pyecrofts and Claudia were likely to be on the morrow; but he failed to extract any information from me.

I was quite determined now that the two parties should not meet if it were possible to prevent it. If that cub should join us, and try to make himself agreeable to Claudia, I felt that some mischief would be done. A misgiving, too, suggested itself whether Mr. Thomas's boast that he had a hold upon the Pyecroft family were not the expression of a sober truth. The man had the courage and endurance of an old rat, and the tender brood of Pyecrofts would have a poor chance with him were he fairly loosed upon them. But surely we could get our little skiff laid up in some creek or backwater when the Thomases' flotilla approached, when, all unseen by those to whom the sight would be painful, Cleopatra and her Antony might sail by in triumph in their gilded barge.

A CRUISE IN THE MOZAMBIQUE.

IN THREE PARTS. PART I.

SIMON'S BAY, Cape of Good Hope, is too well known to need description; it is said to be the healthiest place in the world, and, barring the great frequency of south-easters, the climate is nearly perfect. We slipped our moorings in the ship, that for some months to come was to be my home, soon after daybreak. The hills were veiled with rosy, misty vapour, much enhancing the charms of their somewhat bleak contour, and Simon's Berg still slumbered under its soft white nightcap. Passing through the anchorage so snug and sheltered, the flag-ship on one hand, the old coal-depôt on the other, the outlines of the sleeping town soon melted away into uncertainty. Very peaceful on the slope of the mountain lay the dead, their white headstones just glinting in the newly-risen day. Then we glided by Newlands—where once a palace stood, the home of the superintendent of the H. E. I. C. when that great company wielded a power equal to that of many nations—Oatlands; Rocklands, with its grove of silver-trees (*Leucadendron Argentium*) glistening with burnished light; and, lastly, Miller's Point, once a great whaling-station, as evidenced by fences, door-posts, and arbours all formed of whales' jaws and bones. They must have been of a gigantic species, judging from the remains, but a whale in False Bay is now almost unknown. Here cultivation ends, and even the morning tints which so beautify the face of even the most sterile spots fail to render the landscape lovely.

Going out of Simon's Bay one is struck with the arid and sandy appearance of the Hottentot Holland, and Hangklip range on the one hand, and Cape Point on the other, but a vast tract of sea and wind rolls up from the South Pole, passing over no land to temper its saltness, till it strikes these shores, and prevents any growth till the sheltered valleys wrap round and foster the first green leaves; and so vegetation creeps on, increasing in verdure till the vine and the orange clothe all the fertile valleys, and the "little hills rejoice."

Sea-sickness prevented my having any eyes for the beauties of Nature, soon after passing the two dangerous outlying rocks known as the Bellows and Anvil, and after that for three days, till in the latitude of Algoa Bay, though not within sight, multitudes of Cape-pigeons and stormy petrels skimming the foaming waters were the

harbingers of one of the gales which are so common and so dangerous off the stormy Cape. It almost always is blowing hard—I speak with experience, having rounded it seven times. Bad weather comes on so suddenly as to give very little warning. Mariners, who study the glass, observe that if it falls, and heavy, dark clouds gather in the west, “dirt” may be immediately expected, notwithstanding that the wind may be easterly, and the sky clear overhead. Vessels have sometimes barely time to take in sail, before they are taken aback from the north-west, and a heavy gale begins.

It was soon after leaving Algoa Bay for Simon's Bay that Her Majesty's ship *Nerbudda*, a fine brig of four hundred and eighty tons, disappeared off the face of the sea in 1855—one of those happily rare and sorrowful instances of a man-of-war, well-found, well officered and manned, suddenly disappearing, and the sea never after giving up a spar or a plank which could have been supposed to belong to her. It was blowing a hard, fresh wind from the south-east as the *Nerbudda* and two merchant-vessels—the barque *Countess of Eglintoun* and the brig *Baron of Bramber*—beat out of Algoa Bay. Sea and wind increased as they got farther off the land, till, about four o'clock in the afternoon, it suddenly chopped round to the north-west, in a violent gust of wind and rain. A steep wall of sea rolled at them, sweeping the decks, carrying away deck-cabins and galleys, and washing many men overboard. They lay in the trough of the sea, dismasted and nearly unmanageable, for several hours. When able to breathe again, and to look round at their companions in misfortune, the *Nerbudda* was nowhere to be seen. When examined by order of the commodore at Simon's Bay, where these vessels put in, disabled and crippled, the captains and officers of both ships agreed that the *Nerbudda* was in company, about two miles to windward of them, at the moment they were struck, and that they never saw her afterwards. I have a picture of her now. She was an exceedingly taunt brig, built of teak at Moulmein, with a large area of sail. It seems, therefore, as certain as anything can be, when no living eye saw her go down, that she must have been taken aback, and “pooped.” She would, therefore, have been forced down stern foremost, all standing, which would account for none of her boats or spars ever having been picked up. She is probably sitting

upright at the bottom of the sea, where it is quiet and still, and no gales agitate the deep waters, with all her sails set—a fearsome sight could mortal eyes behold it. Week after week, month after month, until it grew into years, we looked for her coming into Simon's Bay, where her captain and crew had so many friends. Vessels were sent to St. Augustine's Bay, Madagascar, against which coast the current from Agulhas sets. Prince Edward's Island and the Crozets, both desolate islands, were searched; but she was never heard of more, and now that so many years have passed, until the sea gives up her dead her fate will never be known. She was one of the three brigs who were all “lost” near about the same time—*Camilla* in China, *Sappho* on the voyage from Simon's Bay to Australia, *Nerbudda* off the Cape. Nobody has ever been satisfied as to the fate of the *Sappho*—whether she went down off the Cape, whether an iceberg struck her, or whether the shadowy report was true, that, one beautiful night, in Bass's Straits, close to King's Island, a passing vessel saw a man-of-war brig, under all sail, and heard the hammocks piped down, and the voice of the commanding officer, about the time she should have been due at Melbourne. Like the *Nerbudda*, the *Sappho* was watched for and searched for, but nothing more than this has ever been heard of her.

Leaving the Agulhas bank, bound, as we were, to the Mauritius, we sailed southward till the weather grew very cold. Much of my time, when I happened not to be ill, was passed on the bridge watching the enormous size of the waves, and the pretty sea-birds that hovered round us. In the latitude of the Great Fish River, weather approaching to a hurricane burst upon us. The sun went down like a ball of sulphur-coloured fire, night closing in upon a sky black as ink; barometer fast falling. By nine p.m. everything was furled, save the fore and main topsails, treble-reefed, and at last lowered on the cap. I went on deck about midnight, and a grand scene it was. The inky sky, the foaming, roaring sea, all lit up with almost a continual sheet of lightning, showing the little rag of sail and the outline of masts and rigging, as clear as the day. Had I been by myself, standing on the wet deck, surrounded by the wind's fierce howling, I should have been almost dead with fright; but I had a fearless heart and strong arm by my side;

so I looked on till, shivering with cold, I went to bed. Let no one imagine to sleep, however; that was a boon that fled away to some other regions far away. Everything in the ship must have fetched away, owing to our violent pitching and rolling, even the pivot gun overhead, and principally the first lieutenant, who was supposed to have pitched into his water-jug, from which perilous position he was rescued by the sentry, legs uppermost. At least it sounded like all this; but my pretty rose water-jug, that has gone half round the world in safety, took its last cruise this night, flying out of its place, and lying in splinters under the bed. Then the table took charge, and smashed the bulkhead. It was a night long to be remembered. The storm over, albatrosses followed, and the midshipmen solaced themselves with attempts at catching them, not, however, with success. I was visited on the bridge by our kindly doctor, who proposed prussic-acid as a remedy for my perpetual sea-sickness. However, I declined cold poison yet a while; but I took to the lee-gangway, where I sat on a chair, and was pretty comfortable, though I got more than I liked of the "midshipman's curse"—the wind out of the mainsail.

Just as I am quietly resting in the cabin before going to bed, the officer of the watch, who appears always to be "Old" Giffard, bursts in with a great shout: "Fire and lights out, sir;" or, "Ship won't keep up to her course, sir;" causing me to jump up with my hair on end, supposing the ship is on fire, and something dreadful about to happen.

It was a lonely passage; we were like the ancient mariner, "alone on the wide, wide sea," four ships only having been seen since leaving the Cape.

When nearing Mauritius, after a run of twenty-four days, I was up before daylight to see the mountain-tops lift out of the sea, gilded by the beams of the rising sun. I felt quite light-hearted at sight of land after three weeks of perpetual sickness. The mountain-sides run down steep into the sea, with gorges and valleys bright with light green patches of sugar-cane. A remarkable set of little hillocks, called the "Cat and Kittens," shows out plainly as you near the island. A reef projects for some distance, the flat shore with a thin fringe of cocoa-nuts putting me much in mind of the Bolam shore at Sierra Leone. Steaming in, we passed the quarantine ship, opening the curious mountain called

the Pouce, or thumb, which it exactly resembles, and the still more remarkable Pieter-Botte, which is like a sugar-loaf with a head and neck. It seemed impossible that it could have been scaled, and yet Sir Henry Keppel ascended it when a lieutenant, besides a few other men at different times, apparently weary of life.

Our moorings were off Cooper's Island, close to the shore, and very convenient for landing. No sooner were we safely moored than numberless boats surrounded us, full of hospitable friends, anxious that we and the officers should stay with them. I certainly give the palm to Mauritius over all the countries of the world I have visited for kindest hospitality. The hotels of Port Louis must make but a scanty living in consequence. I slept very peacefully in that quiet harbour, after weeks of storm-tossing, the ship still and at rest, with a charming land-wind stealing in and out of the open port all night long.

Breakfast after a voyage is always a treat, and never so much enjoyed as when one has lived on milkless tea and other horrors for some time. I found a childish pleasure in pulling ashore in our handsome galley, with ensign and pendant flying, past lines of busy ships, all moored head and stern, to the landing-steps.

What a Babel of sounds met my ears! Chinamen, Lascars, and Coolies were vociferating, bellowing, and quarrelling with Mauritians, English, and Dutchmen, at the same time ceaselessly running along with a curious shamle, bearing huge bags of sugar on their backs to the ships alongside.

Port Louis is a very substantial-looking town, its government offices, merchants' houses, and banks being really handsome and well-kept buildings. The heat was intense, and a fine red sand powdered everything; very little shade was obtainable, and the long lines of square, white buildings fatigued the eye. Chartering a carriage, a lean Hindoo took possession of us, and proceeded to drive in a truly remarkable manner; he gesticulated, screamed, flung the reins at the horses' heads, and then caught them again very cleverly, and finally set off with a wild whoop, quite regardless of the legs and shins of the passers-by. On our way to Réduit, the Governor's country-house, we had to get out several times, the horses refusing to go on, and threatening to jib and bolt down the long hill back into Port Louis. This catastrophe was only prevented by the

greatest diplomacy on the part of the driver, who adjured, threatened, and coaxed in turns, as if they had been reasoning creatures. "Scélérat, vaurien, vieux brigand!" were the mildest terms of reproach heaped upon the poor beasts when matters were going wrong. So on we went when the horses pleased, enveloped in rain and mist, and arriving in a moist and limp condition. A few quiet days spent in this most charming spot, with the kind and thoughtful Governor and his wife, soon set me up. Réduit is beautifully situated on a flat island, so to speak, inasmuch as it is surrounded by a deep, winding river, bridged over occasionally. The torrents have worn such deep beds for themselves, in all the ages of the world, that the sides are perfectly straight up and down, an occasional pavement over the smooth grey stones in the bed of the river and zigzag path up its sides forming, in the absence of bridges, the only connection with the other side. The rooms are large, airy, and cool, but a general dampness clings to everything, destructive of clothes, and productive of feverish attacks.

"Bon Air," another charming country-house, opened its hospitable doors to us, and situated in the Plaines Wilhelm district, is much dryer, but at the same time hotter. Like Réduit, it has a roaring river with several points, called "bout du monde," from which the silver streak, far down at the bottom of a ravine, looks like a mere thread. The house, a large one-storeyed building—the kitchen and servants' huts occupying a detached position—was a good sample of the flourishing Mauritian country-house, surrounded with a wide, partially-enclosed verandah. Hurricane-bars to the low windows reminded one that nature here was not always so smiling as we found it, but that there came a time when the winds raged like a wild beast trying to effect an entrance, and must be kept out by the strongest bolts and bars. Bon Air was filled with guests, and there was no room for us, but what did that matter? A small pavilion—i.e. two rooms on wheels—was brought from Port Louis at a few hours' notice, and wheeled alongside the verandah, a bed and a few other articles were soon produced, and were all that was necessary to make us most comfortable and independent. Night here was like fairyland, a grand moon sailing high in the sky showed all nature glorified and lit up by its pure beams; night, too, drew out the scent of flowers,

and we wandered through a leafy labyrinth, the air heavy and laden with the scent of vanilla, whose large, succulent, fleshy leaves climbed and clung to the larger trees, and hung over the path, its heavy pods drooping and opening as they ripened. The leaves much resemble those of the india-rubber plant. The Isle of France would appear to be its home, for, except at Seychelles, it flourishes nowhere so well, though very fine plants are produced at the Sandwich Islands. The crop must be a most profitable one, for they charged a shilling in Port Louis for each fine pod. Mosquitoes were a great torment underneath the net, and prevented sound sleep; but what a fresh dewy morning on which to awake, and wander, coffee-cup in hand, among the lovely scarlet leaves of the poinsettia, and the graceful, waving filahoe, retreating about eight to bathe—sometimes in an open-air bath—and breakfast in the cool inner room!

Burnside, on the plains of Pamplemousses, was far hotter and less verdant, though possessing a magnificent view of the Pieter-Botte. Here, again, a charming little pavilion appeared, as if conjured up by Aladdin's lamp: two good-sized rooms of thin wood, with abundance of light, air, and draughts. The sky was certainly visible through all the chinks, and I only trusted it might not rain while we were there. A salute being proposed in my honour, some blackies, with long brands, fired the guns. They stood on tiptoe about three feet from the gun, and having clapped the lighted brand on the touch-hole, took to their heels and fled. The botanical gardens at Pamplemousses are well worth a visit, were it only to see the Madagascar lace fern, and to drink of the pure water spurting out of the traveller's tree, on an incision being made. Paul's and Virginia's tombs, one on each side of a dirty little stream, and extremely out of repair, were disappointing, and gave one no idea of their being genuine.

Sailing out of Port Louis with but the whisper of a breath of wind, we glided under a crowd of canvas, straight as an arrow into the outer harbour, where a breeze caught us, which we carried all the way to the Seychelles, making a splendid straight run of five days.

The Seychelle Islands, a numerous group of coral islands, with deep water passages between most of them, are dependencies of Mauritius, governed by a civil commissioner, and becoming year by year more important

as a coaling-station and sanatorium for the Mozambique Channel. It seems odd so to speak of a place nearly on the equator; but with the exception of cholera, which is sometimes epidemic, the climate is wonderfully renovating, being dryer than most tropical places; were the mountains of Seychelles a little higher, their tops would provide a nearly perfect climate. We went into the harbour of Port Victoria, Mahé, under sail, an intricate and risky passage, with coral reefs on each hand, so that having cleared one, we stood directly for the other, and as we approached that, altered course instantly for the next. Having wriggled under sail in this way into the confined little harbour, we let go in a space about twice the length of the ship, where people usually hesitate even to steam in without a pilot. We found the Lyra here, just from the Rovuma, whither she had taken poor Bishop Mackenzie. Both Livingstone and the bishop had left for the Zambesi again, finding only five feet in the Rovuma, not enough for the Pearl's draught. The captain told me that the good "bishop of the tribes," Mackenzie, having a simple-hearted idea that he must accustom himself to nautical evolutions as part of his mission of usefulness, used to practise going aloft in the Lyra, and on one occasion went on to the topsail-yard with the men, blowing fresh, and furling the sail. It must have been a sight, his tall, gaunt frame, with black gaiters and cassock, disporting on the yard. Good and excellent man, he had laid down to die on the pestilential marshes of the Zambesi about the time I heard of this characteristic action.

Mahé is the largest of the Seychelles group and the seat of government. The landing-place is on a semi-circular beach, a few houses and shops lining the shore. The civil commissioner's bungalow is charmingly perched on a small height above the town, surrounded and clothed with bowers of vanilla, lanes of cinnamon, betel-nut, and nutmeg, interspersed with palms and mandarin-oranges. From here a charming winding path, shaded with fruit-trees, which drooped over our heads entreating to be picked, led to the top of the highest spot in the island, Signal Hill, about one thousand one hundred feet. The reward of so much exertion was a lovely view of the quiet little harbour and town beneath, the reefs plainly defined, and the passage through which we wound our way in entering, curiously distinct.

Coming on shore on another occasion in the galley, and sailing over the coral-reefs with all the confidence in the world, we saw a boy standing in a few inches of water, fishing. I was not therefore wholly unprepared for bumping immediately, when the crew jumped out and waded beside the boat, carrying her over the sharper spikes of coral, till we could land on some rough stones.

A steep zigzag path, magnificently called the grande route—everything is very French here—took us to the top of the gorge overlooking North West Bay, at the other side of the island. Jack-fruit, pineapple, mango, and orange grow wild by the wayside; there was one ravine quite carpeted with pine-apples. Everything seems to flourish here as in Paradise, without the sweat of the brow. We dined luxuriously on rich turtle soup, fin of turtle with palm salad—the last a cruel luxury, for it is the crown of the young cocoanut, and, of course, is the death of the tree. In flavour it much resembles that of young filberts, and costs only one and sixpence. We went on shore at St. Anne's, the second in size of the group, scraping and bumping over the coral, and fishing up, on our return, some beautiful live coral with purple tips, and some fine neritas picked off the rocks. St. Anne's has a sharp peak, to which we climbed, standing among a dense grove of filahoe, nine hundred feet above the sea.

Leaving Mahé under sail for the neighbouring island of Praslin, we passed between La Digue and Félicité, two of the larger of the group, and stood into Curieuse Bay, so close to the shore that our jibboom almost touched the trees, anchoring in a beautiful little cove, shaded with palms. Next morning, leaving the ship before daylight, we pulled round the point, out of Curieuse Bay, passing Bat Island, a lovely wooded islet, and landed at Praslin on a fine sandy beach, fringed with cocoanuts. We were here met by M. Cauvin, a French gentleman, overseer for the owner of the vast cocoa de mer plantation in this island. We were most hospitably provided with an army of natives to accompany us into the palm woods, to bring down cocoa de mer and cabbage-palm for salads. One man acted as courier, four more went on ahead to cut nuts for us, and there was a litter to carry me up; the latter quite superfluous, as I had legs of my own fortunately. We wound round an excellently-kept mountain-path, through

groves of clove and mandarin orange, till the top of the hill was gained. There, beneath us, in a cool, shady gorge, was the largest plantation of the far-famed vegetable ivory, or cocoa de mer, in the world. The mass of them being the female, or nut-bearing tree, were of a stumpy, thick-set appearance, while here and there a male tree of immense height reared itself far above the rest, a straight, mast-like stem, with a graceful bunch of gigantic leaves at the top, and a flower pendent from it. But one leaf—or branch you may call so gigantic a growth—a year is produced; its age may therefore be told by the marks on the stem of the broken-off leaves. The tree is from twenty-five to forty years old before it comes into bearing; the nut, very large and heavy, is somewhat of a kidney shape, and takes seven years to ripen, when the vegetable-ivory inside is as hard as marble, and can be turned into cups, balls, etc. In making new plantations, the nut is planted when it has commenced to sprout downwards; it grows underground to a distance of about three feet, and then turns and shoots upwards, forming the tree. The nut may be left for thirty years, and if dug up then will be found quite sound. Some of the very best trees are two hundred years old. We tasted a young nut, but thought it decidedly nasty. The shell serves for dishes and water-bottles; the stout, stiff leaves, when ripe of a light lemon colour, are split into fine straw, and plaited for hats, but are rather heavy. The houses are thatched with the refuse leaves, and last a lifetime, the slow growth making them of remarkable toughness. Most thoroughly did we enjoy our expedition; so early, and among the dense shadow of gigantic trees, it was not too hot, though we were only four degrees south of the Line. Everything was new and full of strange attributes. We breakfasted, after our toil, at M. Cauvin's pleasant, cool, leafy house, wide-open to the air (though shut with jealous care during all the hot hours of the day), upon the fruits of the earth, much as Adam and Eve must have done; and our host joined us at dinner in the evening, full of freshest information on all subjects connected with his long life here, among the cocoas de mer, quite looking upon them as his children and grandchildren.

In the evening we ran over to Curieuse Bay in the galley. This is a Government establishment, under the charge of a

superintendent of lepers, the island being appropriated alone to lepers, from Mauritius, Roderigues, and the Seychelles. We were met by the superintendent, who took one of our party to visit the poor wretches officially. There are but ten now alive, who have the whole beautiful island to themselves. The same fear and terror of these miserable human beings obtains now as in the olden time, when "Helon was a leper, and was driven forth from the haunts of men into the lone wilderness, to die." Only one comfort seemed to be granted to them—the society of their kind. Each one kept his or her coffin in his or her own hut. It would seem like an unnecessary aggravation of their distress; but it is their own desire, in consequence of one of them having once died too poor to purchase a coffin. It was an appalling sight, these ten miserable souls assembled for inspection. They suffer more from a form of elephantiasis than the Syrian leprosy; but it is quite as infectious, attacking the nose, fingers, and toes, and rotting them away like diseased wood. Added to this, they suffer from a chronic skin-disease, which is in the blood, and will only yield temporarily to remedies. One was thankful to shake the dust off one's feet on leaving this lovely island—far too beautiful and fertile a spot to be "a place of skulls," shunned by the whole world. The traveller's tree grows in Curieuse to an immense size, much resembling a gigantic banana. The water, spurting from it on making a gash with a knife, is mawkish to the taste, but extraordinarily cool and refreshing.

GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART.

GOOD-BYE, sweetheart! The quaint old phrase
We jested at in olden days;
When Faith was fresh, and Hope was strong,
Before we knew that Love could wrong,
Or set our feet in Sorrow's ways.

Now we have learnt how Trust betrays;
And bitter doubts and terrors throng
The words half dear when all were young.
Good-bye, sweetheart!

Oh, soft refrain of idle song,
What memories lurk its notes among!
For us, no hope its pain allays.
With eyes all dim with boding haze,
Our faltering lips delay it long,
"Good-bye, sweetheart."

SHILLINGBURY SKETCHES.

OUR MAN OF LAW.

THE dramatist who first evolved from his imagination the popular type of the stage attorney, an individual who, as far as my memory serves, is nearly always a

villain, certainly did not gather his materials from the study of Mr. Richard Merridew—Lawyer Merridew, everybody called him—the gentleman who did all the legal business worth doing in Shillingbury and in the neighbouring villages. The stage attorney is usually represented by a supple-backed, dodging, fidgety person, meagre in form, and clad in a suit of black broadcloth. He generally wears a high stove-pipe hat, and always carries a blue bag, which he holds between his knees when he wants to bring out of it a forged will, or a writ for the immediate arrest of the hero of the play.

Mr. Merridew was one of those men who seem to belong to the middle-aged period all through their lives. I cannot think of him as ever having been young, and in his later years he never appeared to me an old man. The fact is that men of the provinces, in the last generation, defied the assaults of time far more effectually than their descendants do nowadays, and far more effectually than dwellers in towns ever did. Uneventful careers, regular habits of life, pure air, and early hours kept them practically ten years younger than Londoners born in the same month. There was gout here and there, no doubt; but that was not to be wondered at, seeing that the old boys drank port, winter and summer. In Shillingbury there was a saying, however, that port, if it gave one complaint, cured ten.

Mr. Merridew lived a regular life even for a dweller in the country of that period. He drank no more port than was good for him, and what he did drink was so excellent in quality that he might have taken a very large quantity of it without any fear of gouty toes. At an early age he had fixed his style of dress and general toilette, and to this one style he adhered steadily all through his life. The cut of his whiskers was just the same in 1860 as in 1825. A pair of pepper-and-salt trousers, a tail-coat and waistcoat of broadcloth, a rather high neckcloth, collars of a fashion at present affected by personages in the highest walk of politics, and a pair of Wellington boots made up an attire which varied only in the substitution of a white waistcoat for the one of broadcloth, and of a checked linen cravat for the silk neckerchief, during the summer months. In the process of the suns, the natural man changed as little as was possible, and the man, as affected by the tailor's art, changed not at all.

Mr. Merridew lived in a house of a type which is the peculiar growth of an English provincial town, as truly as the British constitution is the outcome of the mingled inconsistencies and good sense of the average Englishman. You would never find a house the least like it anywhere else. It stood almost in the middle of the High Street, and if judged by the face it turned to the outer world, was certainly not a thing of beauty. It was very long and very low, and always looked as if it had just recently been treated to a fresh coat of stone-coloured paint. On entering by the street-door you had to descend two steps, and these brought you into a large square hall with another door in front. If you went through this, out into the garden beyond, you would see that Lawyer Merridew had made for himself as comfortable a dwelling-place as the heart of an Englishman need wish for. There were bay-windows to every room, and verandahs between them. Over bay-window, and verandah, and wall were trained roses, which in the summer would have qualified the house for a site by the side of Bende-meer, and mixed with the roses were wistaria and virginia-creepers, which in spring and autumn made the place all glorious with pale-blue blossom and foliage of rich deep red. In front of the house stretched a wide expanse of lawn, never profaned by the foot of the croquet-player, even when that game was at its zenith, and surely untouched by the more violent humours of lawn-tennis in these latter days. You might walk on this lawn if the weather were not too wet, or too dry, or if your boots were not too heavily nailed; but woe to you if you left a heel-mark of any sort behind you! I should have liked to see Mr. Merridew's face if anyone had proposed a game of tennis on the lawn on a wet day in July.

It was a common remark in Shillingbury that Lawyer Merridew knew everyone's business. It is true that Dr. Goldingham and he together might have compiled a manual of the family secrets of the town and district, from their joint experience, which would have been interesting reading. People are apt to tell the whole truth, or very nearly the whole truth about themselves and their troubles when they call in either the doctor or the lawyer, and at one time or another nearly everybody of mark in Shillingbury had been under the hands of one or other of our professional men. It would be too long to tell here all

the offices which Mr. Merridew filled. Local clerkships have become very numerous—shamefully numerous, the local ratepayer is wont to declare—under recent Acts of Parliament, and Mr. Merridew stepped into every clerkship as it was created, just as naturally as Irish patriots blossom into Commissioners and colonial Judges. Once a gentleman who could not make his way in London came down to Shillingbury and hired a house, putting on his front door a brass-plate which set forth that he was a solicitor and a commissioner for administering oaths in chancery. He was a pleasant man enough, and in private life people rather took to him, but the idea that any one should go to him for legal advice, when they could go to Lawyer Merridew, was too ridiculous. He had a certain sense of humour himself; and, having paid one year's rent and taxes without getting a shilling in the way of legal charges, he struck his tent and retired whither he had come. The neatness which reigned in Mr. Merridew's house and garden was not wanting in the office. The law, as we all know, is a risky and a perilous thing, but if all the rest of the world had been as well ordered as Mr. Merridew's office, there would have been little need ever to call it into requisition. I remember I used to wonder as a youngster what could be inside those strong boxes marked "Folkshire Estate," "Hodgett's Exors.," or "Whitty's Trustees." The office ran down one side of the garden, and the clerks, as they sat at their work, had a much more pleasant outlook than ever greets the eye of the London scrivener. Mr. Merridew's own room was hung with rare old prints; and there, on shelves where one would naturally look for dusty bundles of deeds, were ranged some exquisite porcelain vases and bronze statuettes. Though he had such a pleasant sanctum, Mr. Merridew transacted much of his business in the open air. On market-days, when it was fine, he was always to be found opposite a particular window of The Black Bull, and whenever the West Folkshire Hounds might meet anywhere in the district, he would be sure to be at the coverside on his weight-carrying cob. Here, too, he worked off a good lot of appointments. Mr. Gillespie, Lord Folkshire's agent, would certainly have something to say to him, and there were many squires who, though they hunted in pink, were troubled with mortgages, and other landlord plagues, and liked to talk over these matters of

business with their legal adviser in the saddle better than when seated in the clients' chair in the Shillingbury office. Many of them no doubt would have done wisely to put down their stables, and keep out of the hunting-field; and Mr. Merridew, very likely, held this view also; but it was no part of his business to make it known to those most intimately concerned.

Though Mr. Merridew hunted pretty regularly, I doubt whether his heart was really in the sport; but if his allegiance to the "noble science" was a trifle forced, it was certainly given freely enough to partridge-shooting. Through September, October, and even in November, he would always manage to get two days a week. Few men enjoyed a day's shooting so much as he did, and small wonder. He knew all the pleasure and none of the troubles of a partridge manor. No need was there for him to hire an acre of land for his own sport. Could he have given the time he might have had four or five days a week over the ground of his many friends, for there was a keen competition always amongst the lesser squires and larger farmers to secure the lawyer for their shooting-parties. He was a good shot and a pleasant companion, and I fancy that the dinners which inevitably wound up a day's sport in our hospitable country would have been a trifle dull sometimes without Mr. Merridew, with his fund of ready talk and funny stories—stories which, be it remarked, did not seem to lose a particle of their interest through repetition. They wore well, and they recurred with the regularity of summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, but they never failed to command silence, or to provoke a laugh, though the audience knew well enough every turn of the narrative, and where the point would lie.

As long as we had our good doctor with us, he and Mr. Merridew were the closest friends, though they differed in every conceivable point as widely as two men could. Dr. Goldingham, with his mind trained by experiment, was for testing everything, and having tested, I am bound to say, he would nine times out of ten find the subject wanting, and pronounce for its radical reform or total abolition. Here was the spirit of progress. Mr. Merridew, on the other hand, nurtured on precedent, held that it was better to bear the ills we have than fly to others we know not of. Order, he would often assert in sententious tones, was Heaven's first decree; but I am

disposed to think that he gave this exalted place to order chiefly because its name was so commonly associated with that of law. Mr. Merridew, it is scarcely necessary to add, represented the spirit of true conservatism. I have often heard the two go at it hammer-and-tongs, fighting over again some old, well-thrashed question in the presence of our rector, the Rev. Francis Northborough. I am sorry to say such words of the deportment of divinity in the presence of law and physic; but when I have watched the smile of cold disdain that would come over the rector's handsome face as the others gave blow for blow, laying on with a will—disdain that men should allow themselves to be so deeply moved on a question which must for ever remain unsolved, I could but think that he might have sat as a study for that Roman Gallio, who "cared for none of these things."

I believe one great cause of Mr. Merridew's success lay in the fact that he completely eschewed the professional manner. If he might be giving advice as to what had better be done about a risky mortgage, or receiving instructions for a client's will, he would bear himself exactly the same as he would when discussing with a group of fox-hunting farmers what could have become of that fox last Tuesday at Broomsgate Hill, or explaining to Sir Thomas Kedgbury that he would never have any pheasants in the Blitherton coverts so long as Harry Sampson held the land adjoining. Our lawyer differed from Sir Thomas in politics; but as game of all sorts was dear to the hearts of each, they found here common ground for sympathy, and agreed that the poacher, in whatever station of life you might find him, was an enemy of the human race. Clients, country clients especially, will go to their legal adviser much more frequently, and will talk much more freely, when their legal adviser talks to them inside his office just the same as he talks in the market-place, when he gives no hint, by tone or demeanour, that the present interview will stand as an item in the future bill, with figures in all three columns too, if it should be unduly prolonged.

Confidence everywhere is a plant of slow growth, and in an English country town it grows very slowly indeed, therefore I hold that Mr. Richard Merridew must have possessed special gifts to have risen to the position he held in Shillingbury from his original start in life, for his was not one

of those old-established attorney's practices which one so often finds in England. He was himself the founder of his own business, and a very good business it was. In my grandfather's time, if anyone went to law and wanted assistance, he had no alternative between going over to Martlebury, to one of the lawyers of that city, and putting his case into the hands of a certain Lawyer Green, who was then the sole legal practitioner in Shillingbury. Lawyer Green I only knew by tradition, as he was gone to his account—and a very bad account it must have been if all I used to hear about him were true—before I was born. Stories of a man's eccentricity live long in a place like Shillingbury, and Lawyer Green was eccentric enough to have left behind him a vigorous tradition in a society where traditions faded much more rapidly than they did in our town. He lived alone in an old house just on the outskirts of Shillingbury, with no other servant beside an old woman who came for an hour or so in the morning and cooked what food he wanted for the day. A room at the end of the house, which abutted on the road, was used by him as an office. Here he received the few clients who came to trouble him, and here, so the story went, began and ended the knowledge of the outside world as to the interior of Lawyer Green's dwelling. Nobody, it was said, ever penetrated farther than this dingy little room, for the old woman did her cooking in an outhouse, and went away as soon as she had set out the rough food the old man ate upon a table in the corner of the office.

Naturally this seclusion on the part of Lawyer Green raised the curiosity of Shillingbury, and the most astonishing reports got abroad as to what the house contained, and what went on there in the midnight hours when all the well-conducted people of the town were asleep. Some said Lawyer Green kept a sort of dépôt for stolen goods, which were regularly forwarded to him from London by secret messengers. Others averred that he coined money there; others that he kept confined in the upper chambers a lot of unfortunates who had been found to stand in the way of their impatient next-of-kin, and had been consigned to his care as a sort of unofficial keeper of a madhouse. Some there were, indeed, who dissented from all the theories above-named, and held that the interior of the house was devoted by its owner to the

cultivation of "the black art," insinuating that Lawyer Green had made the usual compact with the Evil One. In the last century, when he began to practise, this belief in the frequent interchange of courtesies between gentlemen of the legal profession and the gentleman in black was widely diffused, so there is nothing to wonder at that it should have included Lawyer Green and his doings. None of the people who started these theories, however, would have cared to put them forward in the hearing of the person most concerned, for Lawyer Green's tongue was very sharp, and besides this he had let his neighbours see and feel that it was better not to rub his coat the wrong way. The old man was in fact a cunning usurer, who had got his paw upon more than one fair estate in the neighbourhood. He had also made himself the master of one or two very useful secrets as to certain defective titles to real estate, and several apparently well-to-do people rose up and lay down everyday with the uncomfortable feeling upon them that Lawyer Green could bring their houses about their ears whenever he might wish to do so. When men like Mr. Green are in possession of secrets of this sort, they require, as a rule, pretty liberal treatment as to the conditions of their keeping silence, and our Mr. Green was no exception. Men like Mr. Green, too, are rarely popular, and in this respect he also followed the general rule. As to his motives for seclusion, these do not intimately concern us. He was a misanthrope and a miser, and people of that sort often prefer the room of their fellows to their company.

Lawyer Green's practice was not a very large or a very laborious one, but in spite of this there came a day when he found that he could not get along without help. Shillingbury was astonished at the news that Mr. Green had engaged a clerk, a young man, and a stranger, who lodged in the town, and went backwards and forwards to the office every day. This young man's name was Richard Merridew.

I have remarked more than once in the course of these sketches that people in Shillingbury held opinions on the subject of new comers strongly resembling those favoured by the ancient Romans, who, it is well known, used the same word in speaking of the stranger and of the foe, and Richard Merridew, coming as a stranger, and one, moreover, introduced to the town by Lawyer Green, was not looked upon

with friendly eyes. After he had been six months in Shillingbury, however, people grew less hostile, and there was a disposition to admit that, for a stranger, young Merridew was not a bad sort of fellow. Whether this softening of manners came from genuine charity, or from the fact that Merridew was a quiet, modest young fellow, perfectly agreeable always, but never pushing himself in the least, or from a desire to share any secrets of the master's way of life which the clerk might have fathomed, it is not for me to determine.

But before Richard Merridew had been two years in Shillingbury, his name and fame travelled far beyond the limits of his adopted home, and found a place in the press of the metropolis itself. Old Green, though he was now very infirm, would listen to no suggestion that any one should be with him in the house by night. One innovation, however, he did sanction. He had an extra key of the office-door made for the use of his clerk, so that he might let himself in on winter mornings, for bronchitis had already given the old man warning that he must be careful how he faced the raw early air. When this fact became generally known, the word went round that young Merridew must be a trustworthy fellow, otherwise old Green would never have given him the run of his office.

One winter's night Merridew sat down in his own lodgings to look over some papers which he had brought back with him from the office. As he went through them he found that a particular one had been left behind, and as he was anxious to finish the work in hand straight off, he put on his hat and coat, and set out to fetch the document which was wanting. The night was dark, and the wind was high and gusty. As he walked down the narrow lane to his employer's house he had some trouble to pick his way, well as he knew every step of the road. He entered the office silently, struck a light, found the paper he was in search of, and was just about to blow out the candle and depart, when behind the securely locked door which led into the house, he heard first a confused noise as of a scuffle mixed with faint mutterings. Then in the silence of the night there sounded a fearful shriek—such a shriek as can only come from a mortal in the direst extremity of terror.

Naturally he turned first to the inner door, but remembering how securely it was always fastened, he rushed out of the office

and ran down the narrow yard at the back of the house. Here, he remembered, there was a back door, and a little window always closely barricaded; perhaps he might find it easier to penetrate by one or other of these. As he groped along under the wall of the house he struck his head against something, and putting out his hand he felt that it was a ladder which stood against the wall of the house, and, dark as it was, he could see that it rested on the sill of the little window just alluded to. In a minute he was up the ladder, and finding the window unfastened, he stole into the house. All seemed silent again. He struck a match, and by its light found that he was standing half-way up the staircase. As the sounds he had heard were evidently below, he turned and went softly down in the direction of the room from which the terrible shriek had come.

Arrived at the bottom of the stairs, he stole towards that end of the house in which the office was situated, and after a few steps he saw a light shining through a half-opened door at the end of the passage. Creeping softly along, he peered in, and there, on the floor by the side of the bed, lay the motionless body of his employer, while a man was kneeling on the floor beside an open iron chest, turning over a bundle of papers which he had seemingly just taken therefrom. The man's back was towards Merridew, and the light was feeble, but there was enough to show him that robbery, and perhaps murder, had been committed. He stood hesitating for a moment what he should do, when the sight of a heavy bludgeon lying on the floor just behind the housebreaker decided him. He picked up the weapon, and struck the man over the head with all his force. The fellow half started to his feet, and then sank senseless to the ground.

The iron chest and some other boxes had been dragged out of a large closet, the door of which still stood open. Into this Merridew dragged the unconscious robber, and locked the door. Then he went to ascertain what injuries the old man had suffered. His heart still beat, so the worst had not happened, as he feared it might. Then he left the house by the way he had entered it, in search of further assistance.

The constables came and took the disabled housebreaker off to the lock-up, and the doctor, after a little, pronounced that old Green's injuries, though serious, were by no means fatal. The man was taken

the next morning before the nearest magistrate, and Richard Merridew attended as principal witness.

The prisoner was a tall, powerful man, with a shock head of hair, a full beard, and a face of that peculiar raw flesh red tint which the Australian sun so often gives to the human skin. He listened attentively while Merridew was giving his evidence, and when the magistrate asked him whether he had any questions to put to the witness, he turned, and asked Merridew, in an insulting tone, whether they now met for the first time.

An answer of indignant repudiation rose to Merridew's lips; but, before he spoke, he looked attentively into the robber's face. Not a sound was heard in the court as he stood silent. He turned deathly pale, staggered back from the spot where he stood, and a few half-articulate words fell from his lips. A murmur ran through the room. Sir David Kedgbury, who was hearing the case, had never quite approved of this young man from nobody knew where, and now he pricked up his ears, and asked him sharply:

"Do you know the man, Merridew? He seems to know you, and you don't look as if you cared to meet him again. Why don't you answer?"

The suspicious whispers of the crowd and the magistrate's suggestive words recalled Merridew's self-command. He collected himself, and answered:

"I have seen the prisoner before. He is my brother."

There is no need to describe in detail the excitement amongst the audience which followed this speech; or the subsequent wonder, which on this occasion considerably outlived the traditional nine days; the surmises as to the antecedents of Richard Merridew; and the speculations of the more charitably-minded as to whether he had not really been in league with his brother, in spite of his fair speaking. But the story, after all, had nothing mysterious in it; it was the painfully familiar one of the family black sheep. This brother had been sent out to Botany Bay when Richard Merridew was but a child; and the family, having heard nothing of him for many years, had hoped that he had either settled in respectable courses or had "disappeared" in the bush, as involuntary colonists had a trick of doing. Anyhow, they had ceased to apprehend the return of their disgrace from the other side of the world; but events showed they were a little prema-

ture. The ex-convict raised enough money to pay his passage home; got wind of his younger brother's whereabouts; and, judging from past experience perhaps, decided that he might do worse than explore the recesses of Lawyer Green's strong box, seeing that Lawyer Green bore the character of being a rich miser.

Seldom had Shillingbury known such a week of surprises as that of the burglary, but a greater surprise than any was yet in store. During the illness of Lawyer Green many guesses were hazarded that, when he got about again, he would soon provide himself with a new clerk; but, much to the surprise of everybody, he lost no opportunity of speaking in the highest terms of Richard Merridew, and of his conduct during the late crisis, as soon as he was able to speak at all. The enterprising stranger with the red beard was sent once more to Botany Bay, and very soon after this event it was announced that Lawyer Green had taken Richard Merridew into partnership.

But the firm of Green and Merridew did not last long. On the old man's death, Richard Merridew succeeded to the entire practice, moved into his present house, and became the legal adviser to Shillingbury and all the country round.

In according their confidence to a man who was, after all, the brother of a convict, it is certain that the public paid an involuntary tribute to the discernment of Lawyer Green, who, crooked and unscrupulous as he may have been in his profession, was, undoubtedly, no bad judge of character. We agreed to give Merridew a fair trial, on his late employer's recommendation, as it were, but his success was not achieved, neither was his position assured, all at once. It is, doubtless, quite as well that a confidential solicitor should not number amongst his relations a brother who has been sent to the antipodes at the Government expense, and this fact for a time did tell heavily against our man of law, but shrewdness, good-humour, and unswerving integrity told in the long run. His practice increased year by year, somewhat slowly, indeed, but the turning-point in his fortunes came when he undertook, and eventually won, a lawsuit which Sir David Kedgbury had instituted against the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The practitioner who could get the better of this most potent, and, at the same time, vague and undefined entity, was naturally regarded as a very St. George amongst solicitors. Soon after this great

feat, Mr. Merridew married the daughter of a neighbouring yeoman, a young lady reputed to be an heiress, a saying which proved to be nearer the mark than such sayings often are, for, when a year after the marriage his father-in-law died, Merridew found himself the possessor of a wife with a fortune of forty thousand pounds.

When men are known to be "warm men," when it is evident that they no longer need work in order to live, it is wonderful how eager the world becomes to thrust work upon them, and so it was with Richard Merridew; after he had engaged a managing-clerk and set up a couple of hunters, clients came in from remote distances. He was known to be a clever lawyer; besides this he had "a stake in the county," and a stake of this sort, in the eyes of the average Briton, is little less than a *sine quâ non* for the man who may have to be made the sharer of legal secrets.

Lawyer Merridew's lot in life always seemed to me to be a particularly happy one. He was by far the most influential man in the town, and he would have been more than mortal if he had not felt a thrill of pride and pleasure as he reflected that this matter would be a success, and that a failure, just as he might vouchsafe to give or withhold his approval.

He had won a good fortune by his industry and talent. He was everybody's friend, and, though he was the accredited representative of a profession whose members, rightly or wrongly, have won the reputation of having a tendency to seek paths branching off at right angles, more or less acute, from the rigid one of perfect rectitude, no one could be found to say that Mr. Merridew was anything else than an honest lawyer.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

CHAPTER II.

THE "powerful and fast sailing steamer," Oriental, having on board Lieut.-Colonel Hamilton, the newly-appointed Deputy-Governor of the Island of Ceylon, was already far on her way to her destination, when upon a summer evening, not less balmy and delightful than that, on which he had paid his flying visit to West Saxford, Miss Dunscombe sat in her pretty cottage drawing-room, awaiting, as was her wont, the return of her nephew.

Mine host of The White Horse, less worthy of credence in some of his conclusions than his guest had supposed, had

only stated a self-evident fact when he said of the mistress of Fair Oak that she had not "worn well." The fine face was hard and lined, and had the sallowness of impaired health, and though a certain distinction of carriage was inalienable, for nothing could do away with the superb set of the head, there was a listlessness of movement and a dulness of expression which put years on to her apparent age. She dressed, too, carelessly and with a too perceptible economy. What did it matter what she wore or how she did? There was nobody in the world who was anything to her but Steenie, and what could a young man really care for the well-being or well-looking of an old woman?

The house, on the contrary, was, in its small way, perfection. She had made it the hobby of her lonely life, and had exhausted no inconsiderable amount of decorative talent on its ornamentation. The pictures which covered the walls and the frames which contained them, the panels of the doors, even the shutters, attested her artistic skill. To her, the one beauty they possessed lay in the fact of the occupation, which had alone saved her—as she sometimes thought—from an incurable melancholy. It was not the fault of her neighbours that she had been thus driven in on her own resources. It was not society that had shunned her, but she who had shunned society. And, after all, what matter how it had come about—so it was. Not all her self-sacrifice had brought with it to Margaret Dunscombe the guerdon of a mind at peace with itself and with Heaven. She was not the woman to complain to others of the fate that had befallen her, but in her heart she did complain of it, and that right bitterly.

She sat—a tall, spare figure, black-robed; her hair, lovely in itself, but too white for the sallow hue of her skin, smoothed away under an arrangement of black lace—knitting swiftly, if almost mechanically, in the window. Presently the gate swung to so as to attract her attention, and she looked up, as she had looked up how many hundreds of times before! to return the nod and smile which she knew would be awaiting her. They were not doing so this evening—the young man came up the little drive more slowly than was his custom, his head bent, apparently lost in thought. On the doorstep he bethought himself of her, and would have repaired his omission, but he was too late. She was at the inner door herself, the eager,

pitiful apprehensiveness of one who lives in the dread of evil tidings expressed in her face.

"Is there anything the matter?" she asked nervously. "Has anything gone wrong?"

"Nothing, I assure you," the other replied with a short laugh, as he stooped to kiss her. "There is news if you like, but it is anything but doleful news. You should ask Nellie."

"Nellie!" Miss Dunscombe repeated in a surprised voice, from which the anxiety was banished. "Is it possible that, after all—"

"Nellie and I have come to an understanding. My dear aunt," taking her hand in his, and looking into her face with eyes at once frank and tender, "it would have been possible, had it not been that we arrived at one month ago. I could not tell you at the time. The secret was hers, not mine, and I was bound in honour; and now, after all said and done, there was no need of secrecy in the matter at all. We had been disquieting ourselves about a shadow all along—you, and I, and Nellie herself. Will it be very trying to your maternal feelings to hear that Mr. Bevan never was ambitious of claiming me as a son-in-law at all? That, in fact, he was rather aghast at the bare idea of it."

Miss Dunscombe drew herself up with a gesture of irrepressible haughtiness.

"The mistake was of his own making," she retorted; "but I have everything to learn apparently. You had better go and get ready for tea, now. You can tell me all about it presently."

"There is not much to tell," Steenie said, upon his reappearance. "You know how things have stood between Nellie and me since we were children. As to love-making, there has been none, I consider, for the last five years, but we were great friends, of course, and I won't say there has not been a little mild flirtation now and then. I don't know who it was, some gossip or other, a year or two ago, put it into Nellie's head that her father meant to make a match between us, and that you and I were in the plot. You remember how odd she was, and how she took to staying away at one time? Exactly, and the consequence of that was to strengthen us in the belief that there really was a feeling upon her side. Vanity on my part, Aunt Margaret; I cannot say what on yours. However that may be, whilst I was taking it for granted, like the donkey I was, that

she was falling in love with me, she was distressing herself with the fear lest she was misleading me, and the end of it was, she made a clean breast of it."

"Who was it—young Stansfeld?" Miss Dunscombe demanded laconically.

"Young Stansfeld. He has not much money, and Mr. Bevan had expressed an unfavourable opinion of him at some time or other, which did not look promising, and then there was this notion she had in her head about her father's intention with regard to me. So she threw herself in a way upon my mercy, and what was I to do?"

"You did not care for her, Steenie?"

The young man laughed.

"If I ever did at all," he said, "I was not long getting over it. It has not affected my appetite, as you could bear witness. I may have been a bit mortified; but to be quite candid with you, I think I was more so, to-day, when I saw I was as little wanted by father as by daughter. For some time past, it has been dawning upon me," he added in a troubled voice, "that Mr. Bevan did not care to have me about him as much as he used to do. For one thing, I have been thrown in his way more; if one comes to think, it is not much a man sees of a junior clerk in his office, and it may just be that now he does see something, he finds he likes me less than he expected. If that's it, I am sorry for it, but I can't help it. He has known me, more or less, all my life, and I can't do more than my best to please him."

Miss Dunscombe looked across at her nephew, the shadow of a smile flitting round the corners of her mouth.

"You are reversing the proverb, Steenie," she said dryly; "you are visiting the sins of the child upon the father, it strikes me. A sore spirit is ever sensitive, and it is human nature, if one is compelled to hide one's feelings about a real grievance, to take refuge in an imaginary one. I don't suppose anyone would be so much surprised as Mr. Bevan himself were he to be told he had changed his opinion of you."

"He may not have changed it at all. You may retain your good opinion of a person—to the extent of thinking them trustworthy, and all that—and take a personal dislike to them just the same. I put it the other way because it seemed, on the whole, less unflattering to oneself, but I believe in my heart the true reading of it is this—he has got to hate the sight of me."

"Steenie!"

"I am quite in earnest," the young man replied. "How it has come about I have as little idea as you have; but there it is. I don't think I am particularly thin-skinned, and whether you believe it or not, I have no feeling left about Nellie. I took her for a time, as she took me, until she met with somebody she really liked, as a matter of course; and I am very glad she has a chance of being happy, without getting worried out of her life beforehand; but I am certain there is a screw loose with Mr. Bevan. What should have put it into my head if there were not? He has always been good to me."

"He has been your best friend," his aunt cut in sternly; "and I cannot bear to hear you talk about him as anything less. You young people are too exacting. The more you get, the more you expect, and you make no allowances. Mr. Bevan has not been well for months, and a sick man, overwhelmed with business, is not likely to be over-gracious."

"I don't see any difference in his manner to anybody else," Steenie persisted. "But what is the good of talking? I don't expect to have life smoothed for me more than for other people, and I shall get used to being snubbed. Only I would rather be snubbed by people I cared nothing about. I was going to tell you about Nellie and her admirer. You must not be 'quite too awfully' shocked, Aunt Margaret. They were caught in the act of—kissing each other!"

"I am not surprised at anything nowadays," Miss Dunscombe replied, without any trace of that emotion; "nor, I should suppose, is her father, as, from what you said just now, I conclude he is satisfied."

"He seems to be—quite. He stormed a little at first, simply, it would appear, on account of the clandestine way in which things have been going on, and then he seems to have kissed Nellie and shaken hands with Stansfeld, and left them to their bliss."

"And when did all this happen? Last night?"

"Last night. Nellie called for her father this afternoon, and he told me to run out and speak to her, she had something to say to me. She was at the door with her ponies, and before she had finished telling me, Mr. Bevan came out, and she said straight out before him that she had been afraid he had different views for her and me. He could not imagine, he

said, how any such idea got into her head. I was the last person in the world he should have thought of in connection with her. If you don't call that giving a fellow a pretty distinct snub, I don't know what you would."

"I don't understand it," Miss Dunscombe said, a slight flush perceptible under the dull hue of her skin. "If I thought for one moment that Mr. Bevan had really had enough of you, you should not remain to trouble him a day longer. But after all he has done for you, it would seem an ingratitude even to suggest such a possibility. Besides, I had forgotten, you are a man now. It is not for me to say what you shall do, or how much or how little you shall feel bound by old ties and old kindnesses."

If there was one moral attitude more objectionable than another to the young man, when adopted by his aunt, it was this. The relegation of her authority by herself always implied a renewed recognition of it by him, and the present occasion was no exception to the rule.

"You know," he said directly, "I should never dream of taking any serious step without consulting you, and you know, too, whichever you thought kicked the balance, the past kindness or the present rudeness, I should listen to you. I am quite ready to put up with things as they are, provided they get no worse; but I thought I was bound to warn you of possible breakers ahead."

It was noticeable that Miss Dunscombe never suggested that the change her nephew complained of could have been due to any shortcoming on his own part. Her belief in him was implicit. The worst she could credit of him was that he was a trifle touchy, and had been more put out about Nellie than he chose to confess. She herself was not altogether pleased with Miss Bevan, for whom she had no greater warmth of feeling than was the inevitable outcome—inevitable, that is to say, in the absence of positive dislike—of what had been, on the part of the girl, a lifelong intimacy. For her own sake, she was not sorry she had been mistaken as to Mr. Bevan's wishes and intentions; but she was too unselfishly devoted to Steenie not to be ready to acquiesce in

anything for his happiness, and she had not yet had time to shake herself free of her first impressions as to the means whereby that happiness was to be ensured.

"Did I not tell you so?" she exclaimed with pardonable triumph when he presented himself a few days later with the intelligence that Mr. Bevan had seriously suggested taking him into partnership. "It looks as if he had taken an aversion to you; does it not, Steenie?"

"I can't say it does," Steenie replied in a curious voice. "And yet——"

"And yet what?" demanded Miss Dunscombe impatiently.

"I don't know," he returned with an odd laugh. "I suppose when I do get anything into this thick head of mine there is no knocking it out!"

It was certain, whatever the lawyer thought of his subordinate, he was no less good to him than formerly.

He came and saw Miss Dunscombe about the partnership, and in his manner to her, at any rate, there was no difference; and no sooner was the deed of partnership drawn up than he bade the young man arrange for his summer holiday.

"There will be no getting away for me for some little time to come," he said. "We shall have the wedding early in the autumn, and until that is over, there will be plenty to be seen to at home. I can spare you better now than I might be able to do later on."

"It is so much earlier than you expected to get off," Miss Dunscombe said to her nephew when they were by themselves. "Will Eric Mackenzie be able to have you, do you think?"

Now Eric Mackenzie was about the greatest friend Mr. Stephen Ellerton had, and where he lived—a good way, as might reasonably be inferred from the name he bore, north of the Tweed—he had the exclusive right to a very nice little bit of salmon-fishing. For the last three years had Steenie's soul thirsted after a temporary share in this precious possession, and now at last there seemed to be a chance of it.

"I don't see why he shouldn't," he said. "I'll drop him a line to-night, and I don't think if there's a bed to be had in Glenartney, he'll say 'No.'"

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PAYMENTS.			Age next Birth-day.	PAYMENTS.			Age next Birth-day.	PAYMENTS.			Age next Birth-day.
Yearly.	Half-yearly.			Yearly.	Half-yearly.			Yearly.	Half-yearly.		
20	£1 12 5	£0 16 9	45	£3 6 2	£1 14 1		20	£1 17 8	£0 19 6	45	£3 16 0
25	1 16 6	0 18 10	50	3 19 6	2 0 11		25	2 2 11	1 2 2	50	4 11 3
30	2 1 8	1 1 6	55	4 18 3	2 10 8		30	2 9 3	1 5 5	55	5 14 8
35	2 8 1	1 4 10	60	6 3 4	3 3 8		35	2 16 3	1 9 0	60	7 5 11
40	2 16 1	1 8 11	65	7 18 9	4 2 2		40	3 5 6	1 13 9	65	9 0 9

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